

# Mexico's Great Evils Veiled Behind a Censorship of Vengeance



VILLA'S ARMY on the MARCH.



GENERAL CARRANZA, PRESIDENT OF MEXICO.



## An American Under Fire During Villa Raid Sees Mexican Treachery and Weak Morale

### Self-Preservation Imposes Silence While Murder, Looting and Graft Flourish and Starvation Stalks Abroad

By MARSHALL BOND.

THE almost complete lack of knowledge in the United States of conditions prevailing in Mexico—to-day—especially northern Mexico—would lead one to believe that the Rio Grande—that muddy stream which one can cross almost anywhere in a hop, skip and a jump—exerts some potent charm on all news coming from its southern side, deleting everything of interest and allowing passage to mere nothingness, making of Mexico a "land of mystery." Yet Mexico imposes no censorship, nor does the Rio Grande present any difficulty in the passage of persons or information.

The silence surrounding Mexico is due primarily to a self-imposed censorship imposed by the most powerful of motives—self-interest—and to no small degree to a continued association with a dramatic and tragic environment until its conditions have brought chronic boredom—as uninteresting a topic of conversation as poverty.

The reason for the self-imposed censorship needs but explanation to be understood. Those Americans now in Mexico and those coming and going have vital interests which they find, as well as their lives in some instances, are least endangered by the preservation of a discreet silence.

Therein lies the sole mystery which hangs like a curtain along the Rio Grande.

#### Pre-Revolutionary Days.

To appreciate the condition of Mexico to-day it is necessary to revert for a moment to the Mexico of pre-revolutionary days. The traveler in Mexico during the Presidency of Porfirio Diaz will remember, whether he journeyed by rail or by mule to the remotest mountain regions, he found respect for law and a security of person equal to any part of the United States. The comforts by rail were quite on a par with those in America, for many of the trains were made up of Pullmans which began this journey in some large American city, like Chicago or St. Louis, and went through to the city of Mexico "without change."

Perhaps the single comparison of train service in the Diaz days and now will do more to illustrate the change of conditions strikingly to the mind than anything else, for it epitomizes business and social conditions in Mexico to-day.

The trains of vestibuled Pullmans with their expectant and care-free passengers are but a memory. From Juarez, opposite El Paso, when not held back by report of bandits having cut the road to the southward, a train pulls out each morning for Chihuahua and Torreon. And such a train! Behind the engine a steel ore car, loopholed and filled by a tatterdemalion guard; a baggage and express car, then a ramshackle *segunda clase* coach, having benches along each side and in the centre, then the *primera clase*—a dilapidated day coach with cross seats as usual, but stripped of all upholstery, their frames as white and conspicuous as the ribs of a skeleton. Behind this a line of freight cars and another loopholed steel car and

guard. Some of the windows of the *primera clase* are broken and a single lamp is all that is available to mark a spot in the darkness if the journey is not completed before night.

Rail travel in northern Mexico takes place in daylight, barring accidents, travel by night being too risky.

#### Travelers Go Armed.

The appearance of travelers has changed with the coaches. Those who journey in Mexico now bear the look of resigned necessity. The men are all armed. The absence of cartridge belt and pistol is as noticeable as that of collar or hat.

It was on such a train I left Juarez on the 20th of last September. Creeping up out of the sand hills, we came to the floor of the great elevated valley that extends southward to Chihuahua. It was a sea of grass, still green from the summer rains and well watered, especially as one proceeds south, by springs, lagoons and streams. No finer cattle range lies out of doors. But we never saw an animal except a few milch cows closely herded about the stations.

Before reaching Ortiz we passed the spot where Villa had held up a train not long ago. He had planned to dynamite it, but the explosion came a few seconds late and its effect was merely to detach the first class coach and leave it behind, the rest of the train escaping. There were eighteen first class passengers in the coach. They were shot down one after the other and their clothes and belongings looted.

Ortiz is in the valley of the Conchos River. Fields of corn flourished in its rich bottom lands. At the station men, women and children passed along outside the cars selling milk, boiled ears of corn, cheese, tortillas, tamales, enchiladas, frijoles and every other variety of Mexican food. Cleanliness as we understand it was lacking, but the food was palatable and hunger satisfying, and it seemed, in profusion. The immediate impression was that Mexico was in no danger of starvation. But the impression was as erroneous as the old one that "two swallows make a spring." After two months in Mexico I learned that many had died of starvation and the bulk of the population was on the verge of it constantly.

The crops of grain, like the herds of cattle, were the prey of the Villistas, as also the Carranzistas, with choice, if any, in favor of the former. It was told me repeatedly by both Mexicans and Americans long resident in the country that many of the Carranza Generals had grown rich from wholesale looting of crops and live stock. The General in chief for this northern zone was repeatedly cited as an example of such illegal profit. It was said before entering the army he had been a little photographer and was now rated a multi-millionaire, that to a confiscated hacienda in Zacatecas he had shipped trainloads of cattle he had seized in the north, and had even commandeered the wheat crops and shipped them to Texas, leaving a starving and dejected population to live as best it could.

The second night brought us to Jimenez. We put up at the adobe hotel across from the station. As with many Mexican towns, Jimenez is about



A TOWN in NORTHERN MEXICO AFTER A RAID by VILLA.

a mile from the railway. We learned that Villa had burned the bridge between Jimenez and Parral the day before, and as the latter place was our objective it was apparent that we were in for an indefinite delay, depending on the length of time necessary for repairs—and Villa.

#### Villa Attacks.

It was 5 o'clock the next morning when an old Mexican came around knocking on every door regardless of the destination or plans of the occupant to announce that the *tren para el sur* would leave at 6. My indignation was just yielding to sleep when sharp rifle fire resounded outside in the street. It was immediately answered by similar firing from the Cuartel next door and from the puffs of a machine gun sounded above the rifles. There was no doubt about it. Villa was attacking. Would he succeed? And if he did, what would he do to the three or four Americans like myself? Hastily dressing I descended into the patio. Already the Mexican guests had foregathered there and were crouching in corners or against walls. A Mexican woman sat on her valise hugging a baby to her breast. I smiled by way of encouragement, but she met it stonily. The men were equally reserved. It was at once apparent that each was playing his individual game, planning his own part and explanation should the Villistas singly in his own defence lest his action should become ultimately known and his undoing. A band of sheep could not have been more supine.

Into this crowd came a Major of the Federal army, crazed with fear. I had seen him the night before in the little adobe restaurant with cartridge belt and pistol, truculent and conspicuous. A repulsive looking man. He was a paymaster just arrived with money for the troops. He now excitedly and shamelessly called for a suit of citizen's clothes, as "Villa would kill him if he got in." The pistol and cartridge

belt had been hidden that their telltale evidence might not be used against him. In amazement I scanned the faces about us. Not one betrayed either surprise or disgust. Any act, however disgraceful, that might save one's life seemed not only proper but wise. Surely there can be little of what we know as honor and public opinion in Mexico. The standards of our civilization are lacking. Some one accommodated the coward with a blue serge suit, and thereafter he posed as a "traveler."

If people would do nothing in their own protection, if they were incapable of indignation at an officer in their regular army acting the part of poltroon, what confidence could be placed in the steadfastness of their soldiery? One instinctively judged the latter by the civilians, and such logic was not comforting.

#### Awaiting the Outcome.

A little Mexican timidly approached me and said in a low voice: "Are you afraid?" "What of?" I answered. "Of Villa," he replied in surprise. "If the Carranzistas have any courage they should hold him off; if they haven't they won't," was all the consolation I could offer.

The nonchalance of these words was pure bluff. I had completely lost confidence in the ability of these people to defend themselves. Most of them had arms in their rooms and we Americans hadn't, and I was fearful, very fearful, of the result. Escape or hiding was impossible. We had to stay and face whatever happened. The litanies turned away and crossed the patio. A bullet struck him in the arm. He turned ghastly pale, gripped his wounded arm with the other hand and seemingly oblivious to all about him started for the Cuartel to see the doctor, leaving a trail of blood behind. The doctor, I was afterward told, was too drunk for service. I went to my room to get a tablet to write down my impressions. Two bullets struck beside the door and a third hit a post at the head of the stairway as I descended. Later I learned some Vil-

listas had entered some of the houses beyond the railway track, had punched loopholes through the adobe walls and were sniping. Some of the soldiers came in and climbed onto the roof above my room. Among them a boy not over fifteen. Age, or lack of it, is no bar in Mexico. It was but a short time before this boy was killed by a bullet through his temple. I went out into the street to see what was going on there. I was just in time to see a troop of cavalry riding into action. They were a ragged but picturesque lot. Soon several horses came back with empty saddles. A young officer who had led them was shot through the hand. He tied a handkerchief around it and continued in service the rest of the day. Neither he nor any of his countrymen thought his act plucky. They haven't any standards of courage or cowardice at all.

After nine hours Villa withdrew and camped a few miles out of town for the night. He ambushed a body of Carranzistas who were marching in from Parral to Jimenez, and it was reported, killed some 400 of them. The verification of these figures, especially for a foreigner, was impossible. From those who escaped I heard a frank admission of a considerable loss.

In front of the Cuartel the next morning lay twenty dead Villistas, thrown in a pile and later carted away and burned. In age they ranged from grizzled old men to boys. The Cuartel was a one story brick building, possibly 200 feet square, surrounding a patio probably 100 feet square, open to the sky. A brick floored covered cluster surrounded the patio. An arched opening was the entrance. Above it was the sign "New York Hotel." The property formerly belonged to a Chinaman who had been murdered. Soldiers passed in and out, as did the townspeople. I felt a glimpse within would be eminently well while.

Accosting a young officer whom I had seen the day before acting as "officer of the day" and who had conducted himself with great gallantry

and coolness, riding back and forth in the zone of fire. I asked him if it was permissible for a stranger to enter the Cuartel. He referred me to his Colonel, and pointed out a tall, sour looking personage standing near. Upon my request the Colonel looked me over scrutinizingly and without comment walked with me to the entrance and ordered the guard to let me pass. At the same time he gave an order, which I did not hear, to a petty officer, who accompanied me within. It was a weird sight, and one I would not have missed. In the patio women were cooking over little fires for their soldier slaves—for the Mexican army has no commissariat. Each soldier buying his own food, and his women folk, who always accompany him, cooking it.

#### Distressing Scenes.

Soldiers were coming and going and all was astir. Glancing along the brick paved cloister to right and left I beheld the dead and wounded, the former with candles burning by them, their women folk crouching by and occasionally breaking into lamentation. The wounded lay on the floor also, protected by a single blanket, writhing in pain or stolidly quiescent. Conspicuous uncleanliness everywhere. It was an extraordinary spectacle—armed barbarism, destructive as the plague; incapable of bringing order out of chaos. Intelligent direction, that is not strong enough—honest purpose was lacking.

Everybody, Mexicans and foreigners alike, asserts that the last thing the commanders want is the destruction of Villa. With Villa out of the way the army would be relatively disbanded and the opportunity for graft would cease. No more commandeering of crops, no more seizure of live stock or looting of scanty possessions under pretext of searching for Villa loot; no more dictation to or bribes from merchants over the shipment of freight or the holding back of the pay of common soldiers.

When I turned to go a soldier put up his rifle and barred my passage.

I was a prisoner. No explanation was offered to my demand for one, except "I must see the General." In vain I asked to see word to a friend at the hotel. What I was charged with, or how long I should be detained, I could not surmise.

A crowd now surged in through the entrance. On all sides I heard cries of exultation, "El Villista." In the centre of the crowd I beheld a little boy. He did not look over twelve—he could not have been over fourteen. His face was green with fear. His clothes had been torn off and he held the remnants of a cotton shirt against his body. Clotted blood showed where he had been wounded in the leg, and though supported on either side, he walked with difficulty and great pain. He had been with the Villista forces in the fight the day before, whether by force or choice I could not know. His wound prevented his escape and he lay in a field twenty-four hours before discovered. He was questioned and then taken out and shot. Whatever fear I had for myself vanished at sight of this child.

The gallant young officer I had first asked for permission to enter the Cuartel happened in. I at once demanded to see the General and to know why I was detained. He referred me to his Colonel, and pointed out a tall, sour looking personage standing near. Upon my request the Colonel looked me over scrutinizingly and without comment walked with me to the entrance and ordered the guard to let me pass. At the same time he gave an order, which I did not hear, to a petty officer, who accompanied me within. It was a weird sight, and one I would not have missed. In the patio women were cooking over little fires for their soldier slaves—for the Mexican army has no commissariat. Each soldier buying his own food, and his women folk, who always accompany him, cooking it.

We walked over to Jimenez to see what had happened there during the fight. On the way we passed an attractive looking house, with flowering patio glimpsed through the doorway. A mother, her sister, two daughters and a baby had resided there. Their name was Gonzalez. The daughter, the mother of the baby, had married a Carranzista officer who had been killed in battle some months ago. Villa had formerly been on friendly terms with this family, but the marriage of the daughter to a Carranzista officer was an unpardonable offense, an affront to him that called for revenge. While his trusted lieutenant Martin Lopez was leading the fight at the station Villa entered this pretty house. It was said that with his own pistol he killed the entire family, baby and all. Throwing them into a vehicle, he ordered the uncle of the girl, who was reported to have witnessed the tragedy, to drive them to the cemetery, where they were interred in a shallow trench. It was said that with his own pistol he killed the entire family, baby and all. Throwing them into a vehicle, he ordered the uncle of the girl, who was reported to have witnessed the tragedy, to drive them to the cemetery, where they were interred in a shallow trench. It was said that with his own pistol he killed the entire family, baby and all. Throwing them into a vehicle, he ordered the uncle of the girl, who was reported to have witnessed the tragedy, to drive them to the cemetery, where they were interred in a shallow trench.

The next morning we breakfasted late. At the end of our table sat the cowardly major, who had now exchanged civilian clothes for his uni-

form. He was *muy bravo* now and wore his cartridge belt and pistol. He was telling his companions that he was used to fighting with machine guns, and the number of Villistas he had slaughtered with that weapon was appalling—if you believed it.

After breakfast he decided to go over to Jimenez, and taking a single soldier as escort entered the little train car that runs between the station and the town. When part way there the Villistas returned. Two of them held up the car. The major's orderly promptly killed one of them and was himself killed by the other. The machine gun fighter had an even break for his life, but he was a coward and through and through. He threw his pistol and belt under the seat to once again simulate the innocent traveler, but the telltale uniform betrayed him and he was killed, as he richly deserved to be.

The local troops had been reinforced by troop trains of cavalry from Torreon. Desultory fighting lasted about four hours and Villa withdrew. I saw one of his troopers mounted on a little mule too slow to get away led in front of the Cuartel. He was questioned, but made no answer. An officer killed him with his pistol.

When I finally reached Parral I stayed two months. I had an excellent opportunity to see the difficulties those Americans who still persisted in mining worked under, and the courage and fortitude they displayed in persisting in their work and which were required of them in carrying it on.

#### Always Ready for Flight.

One such mine was worked for years with little or no profit. The rise in the price of silver now made it profitable. It was in charge of a young man in the early thirties who had stuck to his job through good times and bad. Twice they had been obliged to flee, but both times he and his staff returned and took up their tasks at the first opportunity, always prepared for flight with a bunch of grain fed horses, and always retiring with loaded pistol and rifle by their beds if flight and not fight should be necessary.

These are the kind of people one hears occasionally referred to as "exploiters of Mexico and the Mexicans." They have kept the community alive. Their wages have been the sole support of a starving and pilled population. When the influenza struck the place and carried off 1,500 out of a population of 8,000 they posted notices that employees and their families would be given corn free. I do not for one moment infer that all these people were in Mexico for any other purpose than gain, but I do assert that their efforts to that end resulted in a greater charity—*if charity means helping people to live who could not live otherwise*—than all the efforts of those called souls saved north of the Rio Grande who criticize and decry such legitimate gain as exploitation.

For the Mexicans themselves I have the greatest affection. They are the politest, most patient people imaginable, and those foreigners who have any art in, or believe in, manners will find the practice of them well worth the reward of an even greater courtesy than they proffer, for the Mexican is born polite. Villa seems to me to be a strong man gone wrong. He has wonderful powers of leadership, but the cruelty and suspicion of the ignorant. He has all his life been an enemy of society, and when there shall be evidently a man pitted against him who holds his own honor and that of his country above all else Villa will perish.